

What to expect when you are referred to the Breast Unit at the Birmingham Treatment Centre

Information and advice for patients

Breast Unit

You have been given an appointment to come to the Breast Unit. The Breast Unit is on the ground floor of the Birmingham Treatment Centre at City Health Campus, Dudley Road, Birmingham, B18 7QH.

PLEASE ALLOW APPROXIMATELY 2 HOURS FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT.

The staff on the unit recognise that this is a particularly anxious time for you, and will do all they can to make your visit as pleasant as possible. If you have any questions or concerns during your visit please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff for assistance or information.

What do I need to bring to the appointment?

Before you come for your appointment please fill in the questionnaire you have been sent and bring it with you.

Please also bring a list of any tablets or medications you are taking.

You are welcome to bring a friend or relative along to the appointment with you if you wish – please note that we have limited seating available and they will need to sit in our outer waiting area.

What will happen at the appointment?

You will be seen by members of the specialist Breast Team, which includes specialist doctors, nurses and radiographers & radiologists.

Please note these are very busy clinics and we are unfortunately unable to accommodate requests for patients to see only female staff.

Medical students may also be present in the clinic, please let us know when you arrive if you would prefer that students were not present when you are seen.

Firstly, a doctor or nurse will take details of your problems and then examine you. Depending on the nature of your problem, you may require one or more of the following tests:

Mammogram

A mammogram is a low-dose X-ray of the breast. It involves resting each breast in turn on an X-ray plate and two X-ray pictures will be taken of each breast so it can be seen from different angles. Some women may find this a little uncomfortable, but it only lasts a few seconds.

Mammograms are usually only done in women over the age of 40, as the breast tissue in younger women is often too dense to give a good picture.

Breast Ultrasound

An ultrasound scan uses sound waves to give a picture of breast tissue. Some jelly will be applied to your skin and a probe is passed over your breast to produce a picture on a screen. This is the same technique used during pregnancy to look at a baby in the womb.

Fine Needle Aspiration (FNA)

If there is a lump or an abnormal area in your breast, a fine needle may be passed into the area and a sample of cells taken using a syringe. The cells are then looked at under a microscope.

Core Biopsy

Occasionally some women need to have a core biopsy. A core biopsy involves a larger needle being passed into your breast to take a sample of tissue, rather than just cells. You will be given a local anaesthetic injection to numb the area before the biopsy is done.

What are the benefits of the tests?

The benefit of the tests is that they can help your doctor to diagnose any breast problems.

What are the risks of the tests?

There is a very low risk of complications with any of these tests, but the biopsy or FNA may cause a little bruising.

Are there any alternative tests?

There are no alternative tests that will give your doctor the information they need.

What are the risks of not having the tests?

If your doctor thinks the tests would be beneficial, and you choose not to have them, it might not be possible to diagnose any problems.

After the tests

You will be able to go back to your normal daily activities after your appointment.

If you have had a core biopsy you may have some discomfort in the area the biopsy was taken from. This can be relieved with painkillers such as paracetamol. There may also be some bruising to the area but this settles quickly.

How do I get the results of the tests?

You will get your test results at the clinic so will not need to come back again. Sometimes you may need another appointment to come back to another clinic to get the results of your tests. This will be explained to you by your doctor. Your GP will also be informed of the results and you will get a copies of any letters we send to your GP.

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